**Africa RISING Program Coordination Team**

**Responses to the internally commissioned external review of Africa RISING** 11 May 2020

* External review report download link - <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/108031>

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Nr** | **Recommendation** | **Response** | | **Responsible for implementation/**  **follow-up** | **Need for extra funds?** | **Priority (high, medium, low)** | **Not feasible/**  **Not relevant/**  **underway** | **Additional comments** |
| **Short** | **Context** |
| **1. Organizational structure** | | | | | | | | |
| 1.1-A | AR governance mechanisms should actively guide research proposal solicitation and evaluation processes and selection criteria to re-balance emphasis across the five program outcomes. | Accepted | This is an important aspect of the program. There is already an existing process in place for this, but it can be strengthened by developing a strategy for improving this both at the proposal development and evaluation levels. | Irmgard, Fred & Mateete to discuss this further and come back with more detailed, practical action points. | No need for extra funds | High |  |  |
| 1.1-B | AR regional projects should increase research funding and staffing related to the Economic, Environmental, Human, and especially Social outcomes | Not accepted | This recommendation has already been implemented by the program and to the extent possible specialist staff recruited for each of the outcomes mentioned. However, if there is further need, the program team will recruit/work with consultants (if they can be identified). |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1.1-C | To increase their use in research synthesis, program leaders should revisit the objectives and guidance for technical reporting. | Accepted | We consider this recommendation to be important. Some further thinking needed around how best to organize technical reporting by partners across the 3 projects. The regional Chief Scientists to discuss this and present a concrete plan for how to facilitate research synthesis. | Chief Scientists – Mateete, Kindu, Fred | No or minimal need for extra funds | High |  |  |
| 1.2-A | Program leaders should target cross-project harmonization efforts toward highest potential outcomes | Accepted | This is already happening, and more efforts will be invested in future to further enhance this. For example, last year (2019) there was a cross regional-exchange visit to Ghana followed by a workshop to identify cross-regional research publications on 5 themes which are now at different stages of development. | Project managers – Irmgard and Peter - with support from the PCT. | This could require some extra funds where some ‘common activities’ are absent in certain locations | High |  |  |
| 1.2 B | Promote cross-regional collaborations through the annual program-wide science event and new incentives for follow-through | Accepted | This is already being done. Will continue and further efforts will be invested to ensure stronger follow up of agreed actions. | Irmgard, Peter and Jonathan |  |  |  |  |
| 1.3-A | The PCT should continue to promote harmonized operational arrangements to ensure program-wide delivery of outputs, outcomes and impacts | Accepted | This is already happening. But there is always room for improvement, and more will be done. | PCT, with support from the project managers | No need for extra funds | High | Underway | IFPRI team will replicate what is being done for Ghana with USAID for each of the other AR countries. |
| 1.4-A | Continue effective operation of the Program Coordination Team and consider developing more explicit protocols for achieving compromise in the absence of consensus | Not accepted | Taking decisions through consensus has been one the PCT’s strengths and a key recipe for success and ownership. Although, building consensus sometimes slows down processes, the PCT would like to continue operating in this way. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1.4-B | Extend workplan-based prioritization and program-level integration of the communications function. | Accepted | This is already happening. The program comms. and the project comms. will continue to do this within the extent possible. | Jonathan, with support from project managers | No need for extra funds | Low |  |  |
| 1.4-C | The PCT should assess the effectiveness of the M&E Team’s integration with other AR program functions and identify / implement course corrections | Accepted | An important recommendation. The M&E team to discuss this issue further and present some further actions to the PCT. | Carlo to discuss this recommendation with the M&E team to develop actionable suggestions for addressing this recommendation. | This could require some extra funds for collecting extra M&E data | High | Underway | Instead of bi-weekly meetings, DC-based staff will hold weekly virtual meetings with M&E officers and will coordinate with regional projects to organize more trainings for M&E officers and researchers. M&E officers will be required to travel to countries outside their duty station on a regular basis, the cost of which will be covered as part of the reallocated funds. A communication channel (MS Teams) has been created to facilitate communication b/n DC-based staff and local M&E officers. |
| 1.4-D | Candidly revisit the mandate and functioning of Project Steering Committees | Accepted | The relevance and value addition/proposition of the project steering committees to be reviewed by the PCT and a decision made at the next meeting. | PCT | No need for extra funds | High |  | Irmgard to share minutes and the ToRs of the two project steering committees in ESA and WA for review by PCT members.  ------------  I wonder whether the PCT can make decisions affecting the SCs - Irmgard |
| **2. Data Management, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning** | | | | | | | | |
| 2.1-A | Strengthen integration of research data with anecdotal information to enhance AR program insights for use by researchers, partners, and stakeholders | Accepted | This is a fair comment and the comms. team and M&E will have a follow up meeting to develop specific outputs. | Carlo and Jonathan | No need for extra funds | Medium | Underway | This is part of the research process and program-wide synthesis. |
| 2.1-B | AR program leaders should monitor and evaluate how research and development partners use AR-generated data and information. | Accepted | Important recommendation. The M&E team to have a follow up discussion and develop specific action points for this recommendation. | Carlo and the M&E team | No need for extra funds | Medium | Feasible | IFPRI will work with Comm team to implement online surveys to seek feedback from those who have accessed AR-generated data through Dataverse, provided that reaching out to data users is possible/allowed given confidentiality concerns (per GDPR). |
| 2.2-A | AR program leaders should guide and monitor more timely uploading of AR-generated data onto Dataverse | Accepted | This is an important recommendation. More emphasis to be made at project level (close supervision by Chief Scientists with the help of M&E Officers) to monitor whether data have been uploaded onto Dataverse. So far, this approach seems to be working well in West Africa. | Fred, Mateete and Kindu, with strong input from M&E officers and M&E team | No need for extra funds | High |  | The contracts already state that compliance with the Data Management Plan is a pre-requisite for further funding. The Chief Scientists and M&E officers are not involved in contract drafting.  ------------  IFPRI's training to the M&E officers will cover details on how to monitor uploads given proposed data collection plans.  M&E officers should have details of all project proposals and have the due date for when the project generated data is to be uploaded on the Africa RISING dataverse. Scientists are bound to upload data annually. |
| 2.3-A | Program leaders should re-articulate and amplify commitments to monitoring and evaluation | Accepted | We consider this recommendation as important, but no immediate response. It is also linked to recommendation, 2.1 A & 2.3 A. M&E team to discuss this further and respond. | Carlo and the M&E team to have a follow up discussion and provide action point/response. | Will require funds if a learning specialist is to be recruited. | High | Feasible | Lack of commitment is unlikely to be solved by bringing additional staff. Efforts and resources should be directed towards strengthening the capacity of local M&E officers to equip them with the skills and resources needed for, for example, a more frequent travel outside their duty station/country to interact more with researchers. |
| 2.3-B | Program leaders should promote consistent use of strategies and tools for tracking all three types of AR beneficiaries, particularly scaling beneficiaries | Accepted | Already happening. M&E team has held in-country meetings and trainings with M&E Officers about this. Different tools have also been developed to help collect information about all types of beneficiaries. M&E team and officers to also start complementing the AR data on beneficiaries with those collected and gathered by development partner institutions. | Carlo and the M&E team | No need for extra funds | High | Feasible | M&E team should involve Julius Manda (ESA Project Economist). He is currently implementing an activity with this objective. IFPRI will organize additional trainings to enhance the use of existing monitoring tools. The recurring weekly meetings with local M&E officers or adapt them to local settings.  The need and importance of regular maintenance of the BTTT will be emphasized to the data managers. |
| 2.4-A | Build on existing learning activities within countries and regional projects to develop joint publications and program success stories, focused on program-wide analyses and high-potential outcomes and impacts. | Accepted | Already happening, but on an ad-hoc basis. M&E team to work with the Comms. team to develop actionable responses to this recommendation. | Carlo and Jonathan | This could require some extra funds to develop joint publications | High | Underway | See recommendation **2.1A** |
| 2.4-B | Assess the AR program’s progress toward integration of agricultural and socioeconomic domains in the context of similar programs | Accepted | Good recommendation, but it is not easy to implement and would require further thoughts to develop concrete action points. | Mateete, Kindu and Fred, with support from PCT | This could require some extra funds to collect SIAF data | High |  |  |
| **3. Research and Development partnerships** | | | | | | | | |
| 3.1-A | Maintain, strengthen, and backstop Research in Development partnerships | Accepted | This is a reasonable recommendation. We are already doing this in various ways (as much/far as possible). For instance, we are always continuously evaluating which partners deliver and those who don’t, then either stop or continue. | Project managers – Irmgard and Peter | No extra funds | High | underway |  |
| 3.1-B | Evaluate outcomes of AR investments in training | Not accepted | There are signs that there is impact, but we can’t prioritize follow up on this recommendation considering that there are other more pressing project/program needs. To do this would probably require a consultant. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3.1-C | Share the story of the AR integrated research partnership model | Accepted | This is a good recommendation. In light of ongoing One CGIAR reforms documenting this would provide a good sounding board for the ongoing processes. We will develop concrete activities that address this recommendation. | Kindu, Mateete, Fred, Irmgard and Jonathan | No need for extra funds | High |  | Kindu has a draft case study about this topic that he will share with other Chief Scientists and the Communications Team so that this is done possibly at program level too. |
| 3.1-D | Work through research partnerships to systematically characterize and address seed access challenges to scaling AR technologies | Not accepted | We are doing things related to this (e.g. the QDS approach, community seed banks etc.), however it is not among our primary focus activities. There are other programs which have this mandate, where possible we will link up with them. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3.2-A | More explicitly define a learning agenda about scaling processes while continuing to scale AR technologies through high-functioning partnerships | Not accepted | Scaling of AR technologies is ongoing. We are doing this through partnerships with development organizations, but scaling is not the primary business of Africa RISING. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3.2-B | Define and assess how farmers are targeted for direct engagement in AR projects | Not accepted | majority of the farmers who are currently engaged in Africa RISING were selected by partners, so this wasn’t done explicitly by Africa RISING management. Having said that, at the onset, the program also did not deliberately target specific farmers but rather geographic areas (site selection) and it happened that the farmers engaged in AR were located in these sites. |  |  |  |  | Our partners are part of Africa RISING. So, we can’t say that farmers were not selected by AR. |
| 3.2-C | Reassess the mandate and use cases for farmer typologies | Accepted | This is ongoing to an extent with merging of the farm typology work with the spatial and temporal extrapolation domains. Collaborative activity between IFPRI, Francis Muthoni (AR GIS Specialist) and Wageningen currently in the works. | Kindu, Mateete and Fred, with support from Carlo, Francis and Jeroen |  | High | Underway | IFPRI will organize a follow-up meeting with WUR and Francis Muthoni to discuss options and develop a plan for better integration. |
| 3.2-D | Candidly re-assess beneficiary target-setting process and share insights | Accepted | This is good advice, Africa RISING team could revisit the figures, however there is no value to the program at this point of implementation. | Carlo and team with Chief Scientists |  | low |  | The recommendation is not only about the numbers, it is about how we reached those numbers. Mark Powel told me once that it was not explained in any document. The “how” we reach the numbers is part of each research team's strategy to reach out and effectively work with their respective development partners. Maybe that should clearly be highlighted in the research team’s work plan. |
| 3.3-A | Explore linkages between USAID’s Policy and Private Sector Engagement and scaling strategies for AR technologies | Accepted | This is a useful recommendation and we work already with some private companies. We will look at the PSE in more detail and where necessary try to bring the insights from it into how we relate with the private sector. | Peter and Irmgard, with support from the Chief Scientists | Private companies will need financial support until the business is functioning | Medium |  |  |
| 3.3-B | Africa RISING should continue to cultivate its interactions with other USAID supported research initiatives | Accepted | This is already happening; we will continue doing so. There are some existent collaborations that are ongoing with USAID Innovation Labs. | Chief Scientist, Project Managers | No extra funds needed | High | underway |  |
| **4. Research achievements** | | | | | | | | |
| 4.1-A | AR regional project leaders should summarize evidence related to program-level research questions and use to establish upcoming research priorities | Accepted | This is a reasonable recommendation. All projects have done something to address this, but maybe we could do it more systematically. We shall put more efforts towards harmonizing the program-wide efforts towards this particular recommendation by bringing together what individual projects have done, some cross-regional learnings and then maybe implement some joint activities. | Irmgard and Peter | Redirection of funds. | High | Underway (to some extent) | To initiate a response to this recommendation, project managers (Peter & Irmgard) will review the research questions and present case studies within their particular projects that could respond to some of those overarching research questions. |
| 4.2-A | Use meta-analyses of long-term Africa RISING data (and other data sources) to estimate technology impacts on household food security, income, and nutrition | Accepted | This is a good recommendation. The program will address this as part of an activity. Lots of surveys have been done throughout the program that could be useful for a meta-analysis. The output of this would be the Africa RISING evidence bases. Immediate action will be to assemble the data available. | Project leaders and chief scientists. Some key researchers from the regional projects | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | High | Underway, but very patchily. | IFPRI is already working on this via ongoing surveys in Malawi and Ghana. |
| 4.3-A | Simplify program logframes (theory of change) to focus on indicators that clearly establish linkages among program activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts | Not accepted | The reviewers may have not appreciated the way Africa RISING operates and the theory of change. It is late to start changing or adjusting logframes at this point in the project. |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4.4-A | Continue to enrich mechanisms for direct farmer engagement in prioritizing challenges and selecting preferred technologies | Accepted | This is already being done. The program team will continue doing this. |  |  | Low | Underway (since 2011) |  |
| 4.4-B | Identify, analyze, and communicate technology tradeoffs for specific farm, landscape, and supply chain contexts | Accepted | Good recommendation, but there is also staff capacity limitation for the kinds of tradeoff analysis that we can do. At the moment, an immediate response/action for this recommendation would be to actually produce more of the ‘medicine label’ briefs for the best Africa RISING technologies. This is because those briefs made some initial assessments of the tradeoffs of each technology when looked at from the 5 SI domains. | Fred, Kindu, Mateete and Jonathan. | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | Medium, but only because it will be difficult to do in the short-term D.C. (during Covid) |  | We could develop the product profile descriptions for technologies and could be an immediate output for addressing these.  The SIAF document would be a good starting point for tradeoff analysis. |
| 4.4-C | Leverage existing data streams to better quantify AR potential for enhancing household income and reducing hunger and poverty | Accepted | This is certainly a high priority recommendation that is critical to Africa RISING systems research work. Currently there is some work being implemented by Carlo and Jerry in Ghana that will provide some insights to this. Other countries to be included later. The PCT will also hold further discussions about how to mainstream the effective use of the SIAF framework. | Carlo | Should be or rather become part of business as usual. | High | Underway | Goes back to the SIAF  The study by Jerry and Carlo on how farmers are moving the sustainable intensification. IFPRI will expand the Ghana work to the other target countries and develop a cross-country synthesis report. |
| 4.4-D | To complement end line studies, undertake targeted research focused on understanding impacts | Accepted | Good recommendation. This seems to be the kind of research that can build on the body of work done by Africa RISING over the past years. Individual projects are addressing this, but it is not so well coordinated at the moment. More coordination to be done going forward into 2021. | Carlo, Mateete, Kindu and Fred to keep this in view for 2021 and develop additional case studies that will address this recommendation. | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | Medium D.C. | Underway |  |
| 4.5-A | Better articulate in AR reporting the actual and potential roles of women | Accepted | It is true that across board participation of women is low in the program. Africa RISING needs to make a plan on how to improve this working through the gender specialists at project level. Also, more effort needs to be put on documentation of the women's involvement. | PCT Chair (Boni) to request Gundula and other gender specialists within the program to review this recommendation and develop actions that Africa RISING can take on this.  Kindu and Peter are also in the process of developing specific gender studies for AR Ethiopia and will provide an update on this. | No | High |  | If we were consistently applying the SIAF then this would come out expressly. |
| 4.5-B | Develop an improved inventory and description of women-only research groups and gender-responsive modifications of AR technologies | Accepted | To also be addressed by the gender specialists together with recommendation 4.5 A | Same as recommendation 4.5 A | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | High |  |  |
| 4.6-A | Increase training opportunities related to implementing and interpreting SIAF analyses | Accepted | This is an important recommendation, the potential of the use of SIAF is beyond the current use. This has already been addressed by projects at various levels through training. However, the outcomes of these are still not quite obvious. Yes, we need to increase emphasis on the use of SIAF as an integrating tool for the program, but training has to be done on a case-by-case basis where each partner will express the areas where the capacity building is required. Training can be organized on very specific use cases. Efforts will also be made to use existing in-house capacity among partners (peer to peer learning) instead of investing more funds on training. | Project managers – Irmgard and Peter | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | Low (training), High (delivering some SIAF related outputs) |  | Put this recommendation into an agenda for further discussion in the proposed mini PCT workshop. |
| 4.7-A | Systematically document hypotheses and evidence related to technology adoption and scaling | Accepted | The program has made efforts to address this. It is however still not well embedded in the program’s activities. There is opportunity for doing some case studies that would generate evidence and then we use those. This is linked back to the end-line and associated studies/surveys that will be done by the M&E team. | Carlo and the M&E team | We would need to prioritize funding during the next planning phases. | Medium |  | The Africa RISING – NAFAKA is doing this, so this project provides a strong opportunity to learn from..Under the guidance of IFPRI, local M&E officers will work with researchers and their development partners to document alternative scaling strategies to feed into cross-regional synthesis report. IFPRI will continue its collaboration with researchers to expand ex ante evaluations of the effects of validated AR technologies. |
| 4.7-B | Revisit capacity building and backstopping requirements and develop exit strategies for partnerships and target sites | Accepted | Good recommendation, but we can't immediately make a response because it requires a longer term perspective. | Irmgard and Peter, with support from chief scientists | Should be part of our ongoing programmes. | Medium |  |  |
| 4.7-C | Document and evaluate different Tech Park models used in AR regional projects | Accepted | There are technology park models being implemented across various Africa RISING countries in different names. A low hanging fruit would be to develop a program-wide generic publication about these models and experiences with them across the program. | Kindu, Mateete and Fred | Probably not | Medium |  |  |
| **5. Alignment with donor and country development strategies** | | | | | | | | |
| 5.1-A | Collaborate with Washington DC-based USAID partners to identify entry points in national policy and at USAID country-based Missions for scaling AR-generated knowledge and technologies | Accepted | There is a deliberate effort by the project to interact with various country level missions. We will continue with this. For the DC based partners Jerry to provide further advice on this. | Project managers, chief scientists and seek further advice from Jerry. | Integrate in on-going processes  We need a good buy in from country missions | High |  |  |
| 5.1-B | Continue to nurture collaborations on shared priorities with sub-national units of government | Accepted | This is ongoing. For example, in Ethiopia, the sub-national government units are always participating in the project planning meetings. We will continue to nurture those interactions and embed Africa RISING into their organs and process. | Project leaders and chief scientists. Key researchers from the regional projects. | Integrate in on-going processes | High |  |  |
| 5.2-A | Focus policy engagement on shifting system-level bottlenecks to sustainable intensification, such as seed systems and fertilizer policy | Not accepted | This is an important area that is happening to some level in the different projects. Policy influence takes some time. The suggestion to engage in USAID convened meetings is important. Policy development is currently not one of the expected deliverables from Africa RISING. Where there is an opportunity for Africa RISING outputs to influence/contribute then we will pursue. |  |  |  |  |  |